RAJYA SABHA

Tuesday, the 5th May, 1991/15th Vaisakha, 1914 (Saka)

The House met at eleven of the Clock, Mr. Chairman in the Chair.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Collapse of an Aerobridge at the Santa Cruz Airport, Bombay

*101. SHRI DINESHBHAI TRIVEDI :
SHRI SURESH KALMADI† :

Will the Minister of CIVIL AVIATION AND TOURISM be pleased to state :

(a) whether it is a fact that one of the two aerobridges at the new domestic airport at Santa Cruz, Bombay, which was inaugurated on the 18th April, 1992, collapsed on the 19th April, 1992 ;

(b) what are the details of the damage caused to life and property, if any ;

(c) whether Government have ordered an enquiry into the mishap ; and

(d) what action has been taken against the concerned officials, pending the result of the enquiry ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF CIVIL AVIATION AND TOURISM (SHRI M. O. H. FAROOK) : (a) to (d) As a result of malfunctioning of the autoleveller, an aerobridge moved to the lower limit of its vertical movement while docked to an aircraft. The aircraft door was damaged. There was no casualty. An enquiry has been ordered. Pending enquiry three engineers and an operator have been suspended.

SHRI SURESH KALMADI : Sir, the new terminal building at Bombay was inaugurated in the last month. I think the hon. Minister was also present. After this new terminal building was inaugnrated, for one of the first flights to leave Bombay, the aerobridge while it was being positioned to meet the aircraft, did not move in a normal manner and because of that the door of the aircraft got sheared off and it fell off which was very unfortunate. Luckily there was nobody around. There was no injury to anybody.

As per the Minister's statement, there was some malfunctioning of the equipment. But my knowledge is that the person who was a trained person to handle the aerobridge, he was not present. In his place an untrained person was operating it. That was one of the main reasons causing this accident on that day. Would the Minister please confirm this information ? The Indian Airlines supervisor who was supposed to be there also was not there at that time. Would the Minister confirm this also ? If it was due to malfunctioning of the equipment, then, why was this system used ? Why were the passengers not taken on the normal route to the aircraft ?

SHRI M. O. H. FAROOK : After this incident occurred, we have immediately ordered an enquiry by the DGCA. There were two enquiries conducted. One is by DGCA. The preliminary report has come. The other is an in-house enquiry by IAAI. But what happened was after the report of the preliminary enquiry was submitted, the Director of Air Safety came to the conclusion that the aerobridge malfunctioning crunched the door of the Air Bus .... (*Interruptions*) .... docked to it. The malfunctioning occurred on account of the auto-leveller which did not function properly.

The Director of Air Safety has reported that the operator was not at the station when the incident occurred. The hon. Member has just now pointed out about it and he is correct. The operator ought to have been there. In addition to this, the Director has also pointed out certain lapses on one side. The three engineers of the International Airports Authority of India have been suspended.

†[The question was actually asked on the floor of the House by Shri Suresh Kalmedi]

MR. CHAIRMAN : Would you agree with what he has said just now ?

SHRI SURESH KALMADI : He has said that the operator was not there.

MR. CHAIRMAN : He has agreed to what you have said.

SHRI SURESH KALMADI : As the Minister said, the accident occurred due to the malfunctioning of the equipment. I think in the beginning of April, in one of the trial runs, for one of the aircraft which came in from Calcutta, again this sort of a thing happened, the malfunctioning of the unit. I understand that an American company has supplied this equipment. May I know from the Minister whether he has talked to them about the equipment and whether they have given any guarantee ?

As you know, Sir, it is a beautiful building which has come up. At a main airport like Bombay why is there provision only for two aerobridges ? I think there are about eight aircraft which stand in line there. Is there a proposal to have more bridges there which are functioning well ?

THE MINISTER OF CIVIL AVIATION AND TOURISM (SHRI MADHAVRAO SCINDIA) : Sir, already the hon. Minister of State has pointed out that the operator, who should have been present, was not present. The Operation Manual also clearly says that even during automatic operations, the person in charge should be present. The operator was not there. That is why it has been duly taken up. Action is being taken against him. There are always some teething problems when a new equipment is brought in. Therefore, great care has to be taken. I am in total agreement with the hon. Member.

The suppliers are M/s. Jetways who are in collaboration with M/s. Larsen & Toubro. M/s. Larsen & Toubro are the manufacturers of the indigenous element—I think 30 to 40 per cent is indigenously manufactured—and they are responsible for the erection and the commissioning. But overall, M/s. Jetways are responsible for the entire equipment.

I entirely agree with the hon. Member on the question of having more bridges. It occurred to me also, at the time when I went to inspect the establishment work four or five months ago, as to why there were only two bridges there when our requirements in future would be much more. As the hon. Member can understand, the plan was passed quite a few years ago. However, on further enquiry, what has emerged is that the airport expansion is being done in a module form and therefore, the future modules that will come up will be having their own aerobridges. At that time, we will try and ensure that the other modules have a provision where more than two aerobridges can be commissioned so that it may be easier to unload passengers and deal with the traffic.

SHRIMATI JAYANTHI NATARAJAN : Sir, before asking the question, I seek your protection. This is not strictly connected with the aerobridge, but connected with the question of safety.

MR. CHAIRMAN : No. If I permit you, I will have to permit everybody. I cannot discriminate.

SHRIMATI JAYANTHI NATARAJAN : Sir, let me ask my question.

MR. CHAIRMAN : You ask a question on this alone. If you go out of this, I will not permit it.

SHRIMATI JAYANTHI NATARAJAN : All right, Sir. I will put a question on this only.

MR. CHAIRMAN : You are in the panel of Vice-Chairmen. You know what is permitted and what is not. Of all the persons, should a member of the panel of Vice-Chairmen go out of the main question ?

SHRIMATI JAYANTHI NATARAJAN : My question will be from the main question only.

MR. CHAIRMAN : That is fine.

SHRIMATI JAYANTHI NATARAJAN : The question is of safety, safety of air passengers.

MR. CHAIRMAN : No. I am not permitting it. I cannot permit you. Then everything comes under it.

SHRIMATI JAYANTHI NATARAJAN : No, Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN : I have to decide it, not you.

SHRIMATI JAYANTHI NATARAJAN : I am asking a questions on this only.

MR. CHAIRMAN : Put your question now, please.

SHRIMATI JAYANTHI NATARAJAN : My question relates to that part of the question regarding action being taken against the various officials who are involved in it. The hon. Minister has just now replied that certain officers were supposed to be present on the spot and they were not present. What kind of disciplinary action is being taken departmentally against the erring officials ? There was a newspaper report recently about the complaint forms supplied to pilots and other officials. These forms do not have to be signed by departmental officials. They have given something like situations which are faced by the officers or situations where problems might arise. One of those forms included a complaint filed by the commander of an aircraft where he said that an official of the DGCA was allowed to fly a plane unauthorisedly. This news item appeared in yesterday's "Pioneer". This endangered the lives of hundreds of passengers on that flight. I want to know whether there is any truth in this, whether officials of the DGCA are allowed to fly aircraft and whether the Minister has looked into this kind of a complaint which has been given by department officials.

MR. CHAIRMAN : To make it relevant, I will add : Was there any bridge involved in it ?

SHRI M. O. H. FAROOK : Sir, no aerobridge was involved in this.

MR. CHAIRMAN : You kindly look into it. What she has said is very relevant.

SHRI M. O. H. FAROOK : We have already said that we have suspended those officers.

MR. CHAIRMAN : She has said something about the forms. You talk to her and see that those irregularities are removed.

SHRI M. O. H. FAROOK : I will certainly do that, Sir.

SHRIMATI JAYANTHI NATARAJAN : You have been very kind, Sir. It is a question of safety, not of just one aerobridge.

MR. CHAIRMAN : He is going to take cognizance of it. But let the Question Hour be within the purview of the main questions.

SHRIMATI JAYANTHI NATARAJAN : I do not know why you are so kind to the Minister.

MR. CHAIRMAN : I am kind to everybody as far as it is within the rules. Shri Santosh Bagrodia.

SHRI SANTOSH BAGRODIA : Mr. Chairman, Sir, regarding what Jayanthi Ji said, I was also wondering about the safety of the aerobridges especially, because the innocent passengers do not understand this. Now, the Minister has said that L&T is one of the leading engineering organisations in the country. An aerobridge constructed with the help of L&T and foreign knowhow, which is not supposed to be very very technical, if that cannot be successful, I would like to know how the Government plans to create confidence in the mind of passengers. I would also like to know : has it ever happened anywhere in the world that such kind of an accident has taken place in the aerobridge ? If not, why has it happened in India and that also in a brand new bridge ? It means there is something wrong in the basic set-up. What is the Government planning to do about it ?

SHRI MADHAVRAO SCINDIA : Sir, I do not really see the question in the remarks of the hon. Member.

MR. CHAIRMAN : He says : has this happened any time before ? (*Interruptions*). He says : it is unprecedented in the history of Civil Aviation. (*Interruptions*).

SHRI MADHAVRAO SCINDIA : Sir, there are hundreds of aerobridges all over the world and the essential principle behind the engineering and mechanics is that there is always an outside possibility of an equipment failing. There is always a possibility in any particular type of equipment.

We will certainly try and take great care, Sir. Action against those responsible for this malfunctioning and who were not there to supervise at the time of malfunctioning, is certainly being taken.

SHRI JOHN F. FERNANDES : Sir, whenever there is any accident or tragedy, it is a common fact that the buck is passed on by the Ministry to the DGCA. The DGCA is a department within the Ministry and they cannot be unbiased about it. So, I don't think it is ethical and there is any natural justice. I would like to know from the hon. Minister whether they contemplate to have any other investigative authority with proper powers outside the Ministry. So that there can be a better fair play in the interest of air safety.

SHRI MADHAVRAO SCINDIA : Sir, the hon. Member has asked about the question of DGCA operating in an unbiased manner. I can assure him that it is manned by very competent officers and no compromise is done or no other consideration is kept in mind when coming to a final report on any air safety problem. Just for the information of the hon. Member, I know in the Railways, the Commissioner of Railway Safety goes into major railway accidents and that the Commissioner, Railway Safety, comes under the Ministry of Civil Aviation and therefore, it is independent from the Railways. Similarly, in Civil Aviation too, whenever there is a major accident, there is normally a High Court Judge who sits on an enquiry, who is totally independent. So any matters of major safety are always looked after by a more or less independent and autonomous type of agency.

दिल्ली में भारत पर्यटन विकास निगम के होटलों को हुआ घाटा

*102 **श्री अनन्त राम जायसवाल** : क्या **नागर विमानन और पर्यटन** मंत्री यह बताने की कृपा करेंगे कि :

(क) क्या यह सच है कि पर्यटन विभाग के अंतर्गत दिल्ली में जो होटल हैं उन्हें लगातार घाटा हो रहा है ;

(ख) यदि हां, तो क्रमशः 1989-90, 1990-91 और 1991-92 के वित्तीय वर्षों के दौरान प्रत्येक होटल को कितना-कितना घाटा हुआ ;

(ग) उसके क्या कारण हैं और क्या उसे दूर करने के लिए सरकार ने कोई उपाय किये हैं; और

(घ) यदि हां, तो उनका ब्यौरा क्या है ।

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF CIVIL AVIATION AND TOURISM (SHRI M. O. H. FAROOK) : A statement is laid on the Table of Sabha.